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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-81T-NI](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Due to continuing concerns about bioterrorism and the potential for future anthrax attacks, GAO was asked to audit controls over public sales of excess DOD biological equipment and chemical and biological protective clothing that could be used to produce and disseminate biological warfare agents. GAO used a case study approach to determine (1) the extent to which DOD is selling biological equipment and protective clothing that can be used to make and disseminate biological agents, such as anthrax, and (2) whether existing federal regulations and guidance in DOD policies and procedures address the risk of public sales of these items.

GAO will be issuing a report with recommendations that DOD, in conjunction with its scientific community, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Health and Human Services, perform a risk assessment as part of an overall effort to develop and implement appropriate controls over sales of selected excess biological equipment. GAO also recommends that DOD take a number of steps to ensure proper control of DOD protective suits and related gear.

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DOD EXCESS PROPERTY

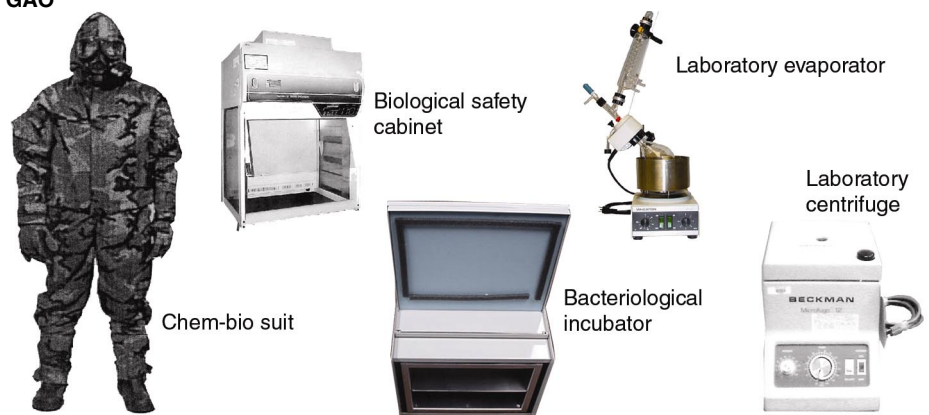
Risk Assessment Needed on Public Sales of Equipment That Could Be Used to Make Biological Agents

What GAO Found

Many items needed to establish a laboratory for making biological warfare agents were being sold on the Internet to the public from DOD's excess property inventory for pennies on the dollar, making them both easy and economical to obtain. Although production of biological warfare agents requires a high degree of expertise, public sales of these DOD excess items increase the risk that terrorists could obtain and use them to produce and deliver biological agents within the U.S. Further, the possibility that *bacillus anthracis* (anthrax) and other biological source agents could have fallen into the wrong hands due to poor controls at laboratories handling biological agents, as previously reported by GAO and other federal investigators, calls for an assessment of the national security risk posed by public sales of excess DOD biological laboratory equipment and protective clothing.

As requested, GAO established a fictitious company and purchased over the Internet key excess DOD biological equipment items and related protective clothing necessary to produce and disseminate biological warfare agents. In total, GAO spent about \$4,100 to purchase these new and usable excess items, with a total original acquisition cost of \$46,960. GAO's investigation of several buyers of the biological equipment items found that they exported them to countries, such as the Philippines, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, for transshipment to other countries—some of which may be prohibited from receiving exports of similar trade security controlled items.

Excess DOD Biological Equipment and Protective Clothing and Related Gear Purchased by GAO



Source: GAO

Neither federal regulations issued by other agencies nor DOD policies generally restrict DOD from selling the case study biological equipment items to the general public. Further, DOD units did not always follow the department's January 2003 policy for restricting chemical and biological protective suits and related gear—masks, hoods, boots, boot coverings, and gloves—to DOD use only. While our audit focused on DOD sales, the case study items are available from other sources, indicating a broader problem.